

## **The Stevens Family: Consuls in Malta and the Levant**

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Englishman William Stevens<sup>1</sup> arrived in Malta in 1803 and within a few years became an established notary public based in Valletta. In 1805, he married Giovanna Assenza,<sup>2</sup> and together they had fifteen children, with only the first, a daughter, Maria, not surviving infancy. Of their seven sons, three left Malta for the Levant and subsequently they took up consular positions, while back in Malta, their father and eldest brother also became consuls. This paper will look at the careers of Richard White Stevens<sup>3</sup>, Francis Illiff Stevens<sup>4</sup> and George Alexander Stevens<sup>5</sup>, and how as Anglo-Maltese men, they were able to establish themselves and their own families in the Levant. It also shows the family's international mobility and connectivity as well as its resourcefulness and adaptability.

A consul, according to Ferry de Goeij, is 'the official representative of a government of one state in the territory of another state'<sup>6</sup> with the main task of promoting trade and fostering good relations between the host country and the representative. As a consular post was generally not salaried during the nineteenth century it was very common, and necessary for consuls to combine their role with personal business interests. Understandably, this leads de Goeij to query, 'did they gain some competitive advantages from being consul and entrepreneur at the same time?'<sup>7</sup> Bearing this in mind, one also questions whether Stevens' familial relationships complimented their business activities and consular careers.

A consul's role should not be confused with that of an ambassador, the latter being the representative of the head of state of his country to that of his host country. There could be many consular posts within a country but there was only ambassador in the one embassy usually located in the capital city. British consuls were mainly concerned with the business relationship between the two countries, which included aiding businessmen, enforcing treaty regulations and protecting the country's interests as well as providing support to their countrymen. Duties varied from place to place but they mainly involved documentation, the collection of fees, providing advice and information, protecting the right to trade, issuing passports, visas and ancillary services. Consuls needed to liaise with their host country and with consuls of other countries. They were obliged to care for and assist their countrymen who may have fallen foul of the local government, run into debt or taken ill. They registered the births, deaths and marriages of British subjects with records sent back to England. Consuls were required to keep records of all communications between the British government and the host country including recording the arrival and departure of ships and cargos, as well as crew activity. They collected information on exchange rates, local pricing, labour costs and welfare. They could also gather intelligence on military matters, this being of particular importance during times of war or tension. Often, due to the great distances involved between the host country and London, and the time taken for communications to travel between the two, consuls frequently operated with a large degree of autonomy. By the time a request for permission or advice could be sought from London and the reply received, the situation may have changed making any response invalid.

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<sup>1</sup> William Stevens (b. 1779, England – d. 30 August 1854, Malta).

<sup>2</sup> Giovanna Assenza (b. ? – d. 3 Feb 1837). Daughter of *Uditore* Stefano Assenzo.

<sup>3</sup> Richard White Stevens (b. 18 Feb 1816, Malta – d. 29 Jan 1864, Karachi, Pakistan).

<sup>4</sup> Francis Illiff Stevens (b. 24 May 1817, Malta – d. 12 Sept 1877, Smyrna, Turkey).

<sup>5</sup> George Alexander Stevens (b. 5 March 1825 – d. unknown but after 1879).

<sup>6</sup> Ferry de Goeij, *The Business of Consuls; consuls and businessmen*; 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the EBHA 2010 "Business beyond the Firm", the Centre for Business History, University of Glasgow.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 2.

Prior to 1825, British consuls were unsalaried but they received a commission from the fees they collected. Many complained that they had to subsidise their own position, particularly in posts where the consular work-load was light and even sporadic, forcing them to engage in personal business activities. In 1825, British consular posts became salaried in an effort to stem complaints that their personal business concerns prejudiced them in their role of consul, and that their consular knowledge gave them an unfair advantage in business matters. Thereafter, private business was discouraged with a few exceptions. This situation was only to last a few years as, in 1829, it was reversed and private business was again permitted in the name of cost-cutting. Thirty years later, in 1859, consuls and consul-generals again became salaried and they were no longer allowed to trade, although, once again, some exceptions were allowed. Vice-consuls were generally allowed to trade as their consular duties were light when in remote outposts that saw little British trade or business.<sup>8</sup> De Goey points out that despite the uncertain pay and often harsh and isolated living conditions, such consular positions were highly sought after by young men who were in search of a 'respectable occupation', especially by 'those unfortunate young gentlemen who found themselves unable to join their family businesses or to live off their own estates'.<sup>9</sup>

The information garnered by the businessman/consul by being privy to consular matters could be highly advantageous to their business activities. Such private communications would not be available to other entrepreneurs and competitors, giving them an advantage, or a 'head start' on developing events. This knowledge base could be extended even further when a consul took on more than one country to represent. William Stevens became a consular agent for the United States, Holland and Denmark in Malta<sup>10</sup> while his son, William John Stevens<sup>11</sup> not only later took over his father's notarial role, but also his consular positions as well as adding Persia and Mecklenberg<sup>12</sup> to the list<sup>13</sup>.

With Malta being relatively small, career opportunities for all the Stevens' sons would have been limited. While his eldest son (William John) remained in Malta working mainly as a notary in his younger years, he may have encouraged the younger ones to look abroad for their livelihood with two sons joining Her Majesty's Navy,<sup>14</sup> while three (Richard, Francis and George) headed east.

As Richard, Francis and George were educated and possessed clerical skills, they were not typical of Maltese migrants at the time. John Chircop argues that the average migrant was poor and in need of employment, with Maltese migrants more likely to go to the relatively closer North African ports.<sup>15</sup> In the early nineteenth century, the authorities in Valletta actively encouraged the migration of persons who were seen as 'surplus population',<sup>16</sup> that is, those unemployed, living in poverty or likely to cause disruption to the social network in

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<sup>8</sup> Report from the Select Committee (of the House of Commons) on Consular Establishments together with minutes of evidence, 4. 22 August 1833. Retrieved on 9 January 2017 from [https://books.google.com/books?id=WtRbAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=WtRbAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>9</sup> De Goey, 13.

<sup>10</sup> In 1833, William Stevens describes himself as being consular agent for the United States of America, Holland and Denmark. NAV, R450 Box B/12.

<sup>11</sup> William John Stevens, eldest son, (b. 15 November 1807 – d. 8 June 1881)

<sup>12</sup> Mecklenberg is a former duchy in northern Germany.

<sup>13</sup> William John Stevens, American Vice Consul from 1869 (although possibly earlier) – 1878. Paul Cassar, *Early Relations between Malta and USA* (Malta, Midsea Books 1976), 119.

<sup>14</sup> Frederick Hildebrand Stevens joined the Royal Navy on 18 September 1823 and retired on 31 December 1845. NAV R450/Box B/1; Charles Francis Stevens had a career spanning seventeen years in the Royal Navy. *Stevens' Malta Almanac*, 1880, 159-161

<sup>15</sup> John Chircop, 'So far and yet so near: Ionian and Maltese Migrant Networks of support in the Southern and Eastern Countries of the Mediterranean, 1800-1870', *The Price of Life. Welfare Systems, Social Nets and Economic Growth* (CIDEHUS, Lisbon, 2007), 334.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 336.

already overcrowded coastal towns. Those living on charitable hand-outs or on state assistance, manual labourers, as well as those with criminal records, were 'enticed or actually pressed' to leave for foreign shores.<sup>17</sup> Such migrants left the Maltese islands uncertain of where they would end up, of what type of work could be found, or how they would support themselves until they were gainfully employed.

Against this background, the Stevens' brothers' experiences differed in several aspects. Their father already had business dealings in the Levant and in particular with the merchant James Brant.<sup>18</sup> From as early as 1819 Stevens had notarised a charter party for a brig to pick up a cargo in Smyrna destined for London with Brant as one of the party concerned.<sup>19</sup> Later, in 1826, Stevens had entered into a contract with James Wilkinson, an Agent Victualler, to provide and deliver twenty thousand pounds of Black Smyrna raisins to the King's Magazine in Malta.<sup>20</sup> As such, he would have been aware of the business opportunities in the region and may have encouraged his sons to move to the Levant, rather than to North Africa, despite it being a longer and more costly journey.

In 1835, at the age of nineteen, Richard,<sup>21</sup> left Malta having signed a three-year contract to work as book-keeper for the merchants James Brant and Henry Suter who traded under the name '*James Brant & Co*'<sup>22</sup> in Trebizond, (now known as Trabzon) in Turkey. This was a particularly difficult period for the Stevens family, their father having just spent one year in jail (released in 1834) after a protracted court case,<sup>23</sup> so this employment offer would have been opportune for the family. Richard's contract stated that his travelling expenses were to be covered and accommodation was to be provided on arrival. This is in stark contrast to the majority of migrants who left Malta without a secured job and who needed to find accommodation on arrival. Newly-arrived Maltese migrants were dependant on their fellow countrymen who had already set up taverns, coffee houses and wine bars as well as relatives who provided a support network and contacts.<sup>24</sup> This link with their homeland would help ease them into a new way of life. Richard was not so fortunate; for on arrival in Trebizond he was to find that his employer's family was the only English household in the area.<sup>25</sup> Trebizond, a trading post on the southern shore of the Black Sea, had only become a consular post in 1830 to promote British trade, and as such it did not yet have an English community. Living conditions were tough – in the 1860's Trebizond was described as the 'land of scorpions and rats'.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 336.

<sup>18</sup> James Brant was a merchant in Smyrna, (now known as Izmir), who had opened the Consulate at Trebizond, in 1830. He was admitted to the Levant Company in 1811 and died in 1856. He is buried in the Boudja Cemetery, Smyrna. Denis Wright, *The English Amongst the Persians* (William Heinemann Ltd, London, 1977), 79.

<sup>19</sup> NAV, R450.1818-1821.1.14, 46-51.

<sup>20</sup> NAV, R450.1826.5.67, 419-425. William John Stevens, along with William Robertson acted as bailers and guarantors.

<sup>21</sup> Richard White Stevens (b. 18 February 1816 in Malta, d. 29 January 1864, Karachi).

<sup>22</sup> NAV, R451.1835.4.30, 5 May 1835.

<sup>23</sup> For more details regarding William Stevens' court case please see Sarah A Watkinson, 'William Stevens, an English Notary and Entrepreneur in Early Nineteenth Century Malta', Unpublished M.A. dissertation, Dept of History, University of Malta, 2017, 53-83.

<sup>24</sup> Chircop, 338.

<sup>25</sup> Report from the Select Committee (of the House of Commons) on Consular Establishment, 22 August 1835. Retrieved on 2 July 2016 from [https://books.google.com/books?id=WtRbAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=WtRbAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false). 192.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Eastwick, *Journal of a Diplomat's Three Years Residence in Persia* (1864). Retrieved on 5 July 2018 from <https://books.google.com/books?id=PVYOAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Backhouse+Eastwick+Edward+Journal+of+a+Diplomat%27s+three+years&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi3neDtx7nXAhULTCYKHZo3AKEQ6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Brant was a well-established merchant in Smyrna having been admitted to the Smyrna Company in 1813.<sup>27</sup> In 1817 he was listed under '*Lee & Brant, Turkey merchants*', with an office in Old Broad Street, London.<sup>28</sup> His signatures in Stevens Senior's notarial deeds show that he passed through Malta on his way to and from the Levant.<sup>29</sup> In 1830, he was appointed Vice-Consul in Trebizond.<sup>30</sup> In 1836, just a year into Richard's contract with him at his Trebizond office, Brant was appointed Consul in Erzurum.<sup>31</sup> The transfer of the Brant family to the new posting would have further increased Richard's isolation.

Richard's initial clerkship contract was a family affair, drawn up by his brother William John Stevens in Malta, with merchant John Clunes Ross acting on behalf of James Brant, and the whole witnessed by brother Francis as well as G. Micallef.<sup>32</sup> The contract outlined his pay and job description which mainly involved book-keeping and stock management for *James Brant & Co.* Richard was contractually tied to work exclusively for *James Brant & Co* less than two years into the three-year contract, having made a good impression with Brant, Richard was transferred to his Tabriz office in Persia.

Richard's move to Tabriz was to leave a vacancy in Brant's Trebizond office so it was arranged that his younger brother, Francis, should replace him - his arrival was needed in time for Richard to instruct him in his role and to 'benefit from his brother's experience'. The unknown author of the letter spoke highly of Richard, expressing that he had:

'affection for him like a brother ... and his going to Persia is essential .... and would promote his welfare and advancement in life. I am not so selfish as to sacrifice either for my own convenience or gratification – I am sure he will get on, and Brant's good opinion of him and inclination to push his fortune is not less than my own'.<sup>33</sup>

Richard's career advanced. In 1846, he became Vice-Consul, and two years later, was promoted to Consul in Tabriz.<sup>34</sup>

In the nineteenth century, there was no formal consular training and Richard would have to learn his trade from working for the merchant/consul Brant. Previous experience from having worked for his notarial father must have been useful. Edmund Hammond, Permanent Under-Secretary from 1854 to 1873<sup>35</sup> said before the Select Committee of 1858: 'I believe there is nothing which a consul is required to perform, which a man of sense, temper, and judgment might not learn to do efficiently, after an experience of six months in his office ...'.<sup>36</sup>

Languages were considered useful and this is where the Stevens brothers would have benefited from their background. Their childhood in Malta with an English father and Maltese

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<sup>27</sup> 'Levantine Heritage', retrieved on 2 July 2016 from <http://www.levantineheritage.com>.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Johnstone, *Johnstone's London Commercial Guide, and Street Directory*; xix. Retrieved on 5 July 2016 from <https://books.google.com/books?id=-9kyAQAAIAAJ&q=Johnstone%27s+London+Commercial++Guide&dq=Johnstone%27s+London+Commercial++Guide&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwirz5XBwLnXAhXDMYKHeRPDUMQ6AEIJzAAI>

<sup>29</sup> *Malta Government Gazette*, 9 December 1835.

<sup>30</sup> *Report from The Select Committee (of the House of Commons) on Consular Establishments* (HMS London), 125.

<sup>31</sup> 'Levantine Heritage', Retrieved on 2 July 2016 from <http://www.levantineheritage.com>.

<sup>32</sup> NAV, R451.1835.4.30, f.269-275.

<sup>33</sup> NAV, R450/Box B/2.

<sup>34</sup> Tabriz is in the East Azerbaijan Province in Iran. Richard's annual pay was less than a vice-consul's clerk, who in 1860, could earn one hundred pounds sterling, increasing by ten pounds sterling a year up to a maximum of one hundred and fifty pounds sterling. FO 78/1525, Retrieved on 6 June 2016 from [www.levantineheritage.com](http://www.levantineheritage.com).

<sup>35</sup> Edmund Hammond, 1st Baron Hammond (b. 1802 – d. 1890).

<sup>36</sup> D C M Platt, *The Cinderella Service* (London, Longman, 1971) 26.

mother would have made them conversant in English, Italian and Maltese. Other members of the family were noted for their language skills; brother Frederick<sup>37</sup> who had joined Her Majesty's Navy, was noted for his usefulness in knowing Arabic and Francis' children were noted for speaking Turkish, modern Greek, Italian, French and English.<sup>38</sup>

A consul's duties covered more than just dealing with business concerns as mentioned earlier, and they also had to deal with welfare issues of the British community which also extended to those who had been granted British protection. The Christian Armenian community were such a group, when in 1848 the Shah issued a *farman* (imperial decree) placing the Christian Armenians under the protection of the British. Richard, then based in Tabriz, was to greatly annoy the authorities by offering asylum to 'all and sundry.'<sup>39</sup> Sir Justin Sheil,<sup>40</sup> wrote to him later in 1852 reiterating that asylum should only be offered: 'in cases of real danger of life or person from unjust accusation that the privilege of sanctuary ought to be accorded: for as I have before stated to you, every instance of this kind is an encroachment on the independence of Persia'.<sup>41</sup>

Richard, was to gain an unfavourable reputation with Sheil who thought him 'unreliable, credulous and easily misled in what relates to self-love'. Even the Shah of Persia referred to 'Mr. Stevens whose proceedings and mischief making while living in Tabriz, would fill ten books'.<sup>42</sup> Richard was subsequently transferred, at the Legation's request, to Tehran, then a lesser posting, and where it was thought he could do less damage.

Francis, who went to Trebizond to fill Richard's now vacant position, had also worked as a witness in their father's notarial practice<sup>43</sup> and while his obituary mentioned that he was originally intended for a legal profession,<sup>44</sup> it was perhaps this offer that resulted in his changed plans. After two years in Trebizond he was promoted to assistant in the Vice-Consulate, then became acting Vice-Consul before moving to Erzurum (Armenia) as acting Consul. He was appointed permanent Vice-Consul at Trebizond in 1841, reporting to Brant as Consul. In 1856, Francis was again promoted to Consul when Brant moved to Damascus retaining his consular position.<sup>45</sup> Francis was also the post office agent, a common role for a consul and one which would have supplemented his income.

Isolation and loneliness were frequent problems for consuls in far-flung postings. Richard was therefore fortunate to receive a visit by his father and two sisters in 1842. While Stevens Senior returned to Malta following a short stay, Ellen<sup>46</sup> and Augusta<sup>47</sup> remained and acted as Richard's hostesses. Rev. Joseph Wolff, in his memoirs,<sup>48</sup> mentions Richard briefly visiting him on-board his vessel in Samsun and informing him that his brother Francis was expecting him in Trebizond. Rev. Wolff then describes:

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<sup>37</sup> Frederick Hildebrand Stevens (b. 31 October 1811, Malta – 12 September 1877, UK). His naval service record was found at NAV, R450/Box B/1.

<sup>38</sup> Eastwick, 48.

<sup>39</sup> Wright, 47.

<sup>40</sup> Lt Colonel Justin Sheil (later Sir), 1842-4 Charge d'Affaires; 1844-53 Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, Court of Persia.

<sup>41</sup> Wright, 47.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 80.

<sup>43</sup> NAV, R450.1835-1843.9. Francis appears as a witness in all deeds dated from 13 January 1835 to 15 June 1836. The deeds are in English and Italian.

<sup>44</sup> *Public Opinion Newspaper*, 25 September 1877.

<sup>45</sup> *The London Gazette*, 8 January 1856.

<sup>46</sup> Ellen Georgina Guarracino (nee Stevens) (b. 27 April 1823, Malta – d. after November 1889, unknown).

<sup>47</sup> Augusta Stevens (b. 2 July 1814 – d. unknown).

<sup>48</sup> Joseph Wolff, *Narrative of a Mission to Bokhara in the years 1843-1845*, 13. Retrieved on 25 February 2016 from <https://archive.org/stream/narrativeofmissi00wolfrich#page/n15/mode/2up>

‘Arriving at the house of Mr. Stevens, he and his two very amiable sisters received me with the greatest cordiality and a room was prepared for me (...) Messieurs Stevens and the Misses Stevens are the children of my Mr. Stevens, my solicitor at Malta, the most kind hearted, hospitable and excellent people I ever met with’.<sup>49</sup>

Hospitality to travellers was part and parcel of a consul’s life, providing much needed company and bringing welcome news from home. Edward B. Eastwick, a diplomat, mentions in his memoirs meeting Francis, referred to here as ‘Frank’.<sup>50</sup> The English consul, Mr. Frank Stevens, with his usual courtesy and hospitality, sent off a boat for me and made me welcome at his house. His children speak Turkish, modern Greek, Italian, French and English with equal faculty, and fairly put me to shame by their attainments.<sup>51</sup>

But despite speaking so highly of Francis and his family, he had earlier commented in his memoir that:

‘and these strengthen an opinion I have already come to, that the English Government does wrong to bestow so many responsible appointments on Levantines and half-breeds. These men have not the feelings of Englishmen, and cannot be expected to be patriotic towards a country which pays them, indeed, but is not the land of their birth, or their residence.’<sup>52</sup>

Was he aware that Francis (and Richard) of whom he spoke so highly, were of English/Maltese heritage? These comments also highlight an issue that was never fully resolved during this period – did consular officials need to be of English heritage in order to join the service? While a British-born candidate may have been considered the ‘ideal’, in more remote outposts it was impossible to find a British subject willing to take on the unsalaried role, and so, foreign-born honorary consuls were the only way to fill the position.

Non-British consuls were universally criticized as being too closely inter-linked with the community in which they were to operate by family, business interests and social connections, and therefore could not be independent with Britain’s interests as their main concern. While in most cases they could trade, it was believed that it would colour their judgement. As Platt details:

‘There was also the point, for which British prejudices rather than the Levantines themselves were to blame, that English merchants and travellers disliked dealing with officials of Levantine or Maltese descent, whether in their ordinary consular capacity, or more particularly, in their official capacity as judges’.<sup>53</sup>

Continuing the family’s easterly migration, a third brother, George Alexander,<sup>54</sup> accompanied Richard to Tabriz as his business partner (before or about 1846) and no doubt George was able to take advantage of Richard’s consular connections and knowledge. George also started his professional life working with his father and witnessing deeds, with his signatures appearing from 1841.<sup>55</sup> However, it seems that the Stevens brothers were not always a success, and while George (and Richard) were considered ‘clever, shrewd fellows’, George ran up debts that were to embarrass his consul-brother.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Wolff, 13.

<sup>50</sup> NAV, R450/Box B/22.

<sup>51</sup> Eastwick, 48.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 47.

<sup>53</sup> Platt, 1971, 157.

<sup>54</sup> George Alexander Stevens (b. 5 March 1825, Malta – d. after 1879, place unknown).

<sup>55</sup> NAV, R450.1835-1843.9.152 commencing 12 February 1841 and ending the volume dated 28 December 1843. He also appears regularly in the next volume R450.1844.10 covering the period 1844 - 1846.

<sup>56</sup> Wright, 98.

George also features, in an unflattering light, in the career of Eustace Clare Grenville-Murray, (b. 1823 – d. 1881), who was a staunch critic of what he termed ‘cousinocracy’ within the consular system. He felt this allowed patronage and favouritism, with posts and promotions going to the kinsmen of those already in top positions. The low salaries, if paid at all, prevented those of ability but of limited financial means to be able to join the diplomatic and consular corps. As Grenville-Murray was a consul himself, he had first-hand experience of the situation, and from his postings he wrote anonymously under the pseudonym ‘The Roving Englishman’. Grenville-Murray was a friend of Charles Dickens,<sup>57</sup> editor of several publications, whose agenda was to highlight social injustices, and provided him with useful connections and encouragement.<sup>58</sup> On several occasions, he was confronted by his superiors as to whether he was ‘The Roving Englishman’ but he adamantly denied being so. When challenged, he wrote:

‘I have the honour most respectfully to assure your Lordship at once, upon my word of honour as a gentleman and an officer in Her Majesty’s Service, I am not in any way connected with those publications either as the author or one of the authors, or as having furnished materials for them to any other person or in any other manner whatsoever’.<sup>59</sup>

By the 1850s, Grenville-Murray had published over eighty articles in periodicals including ‘*The Morning Post*’ (later known as ‘*House Words Weekly*’) a weekly periodical under the editorship of Charles Dickens. In total he published eight books, all of which drew on his personal experiences as a consul and criticising, in particular, the patronage and favouritism that was so ingrained in the promotion and posting system:

‘All the ‘snuggest berths’ went to the kinsmen of the noblemen who already held the top positions. Even their most distant cousins, he claimed, received preferment before social inferiors. Furthermore, this ‘white-gloved cousinocracy’ not only ruled the diplomatic roost by means of patronage and favouritism but also on account of the low salaries paid to diplomatists – if they were paid salaries at all; for this made it even more difficult for men of ability with limited financial means to break in’.<sup>60</sup>

This resulted, he claimed, in a body of diplomats with ‘unparalleled uselessness’, and with diplomatic missions led by ‘donkeys and stuffed with youthful aristocratic dilettantes, their incapacity inflating and laughable’.<sup>61</sup> He also maintained that their tendency to secrecy worked to cover their incompetence and prevented them from receiving advice from outside experts. But along with criticism, he also suggested solutions, and while these were never even acknowledged, they were eventually acted upon, although he was never accredited in any way.

Even though Grenville-Murray denied he was the infamous author, he was hounded when in office, but he survived under the protection of Lord Palmerston (1784-1865).

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<sup>57</sup> Charles Dickens, writer and social critic (b.1812 - d.1870).

<sup>58</sup> G.R. Berridge, *Diplomacy and Journalism in the Victorian era: Charles Dickens, the Roving Englishman and the ‘white gloved ‘cousinocracy’*, 2012, retrieved on 24 July 2016 from [grberridge.diplomacy.edu](http://grberridge.diplomacy.edu), 9. Dickens was good friends with Lord John Russell, who was either prime minister or foreign secretary during Grenville-Murray’s diplomatic career. Grenville-Murray was the illegitimate son of the first Duke of Buckingham & Chandos, his mother the actress and courtesan Emma Murray. He was therefore the half-brother of the second Duke of Buckingham and a ‘relative’ of the third Duke of Buckingham who was Colonial Secretary in the late 1860’s.

<sup>59</sup> G. R. Berridge, *A Diplomatic Whistleblower in the Victorian Era, The Life and Writings of E.C. Grenville-Murray*, Second Edition (revised) 2013. Retrieved on 9 May 2017 from <http://grberridge.diplomacy.edu/>

<sup>60</sup> Berridge, 2012, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 5.

However, when Palmerston died in 1865, the Foreign Office was free to act and in 1868 Grenville-Murray was dismissed with the loss of his pension.<sup>62</sup>

George was to play a part in his downfall. Grenville-Murray had an unusually mobile career, moving frequently from post to post, usually due to a dissatisfied superior. George, as his vice-consul in the outpost of Kherson, reported to him at Odessa. This enabled him to do 'great harm'<sup>63</sup> when he was appointed acting consul-general while Grenville-Murray went on leave in 1866. George was not on good terms with Grenville-Murray, for 'personal reasons', including a perceived lack of professional support (others were promoted when George was not) as well as a supposed lack of personal support when two of his young children died of cholera.<sup>64</sup> The feelings appear to be mutual, with Grenville-Murray regarding Stevens as 'neither truthful nor trustworthy'.<sup>65</sup> In 1867, when a list of complaints were made by other parties against Grenville-Murray, George was to be an 'eager assistant'.<sup>66</sup> When a formal investigation into Grenville-Murray's affairs was conducted, the investigator, Edward Wilkins,<sup>67</sup> lodged with George in Odessa, even though he was the chief witness for the prosecution, giving him ample opportunity to give his opinion to Wilkins.<sup>68</sup>

While George had personal issues with Grenville-Murray, why he was willing to side with the anti-Grenville-Murray faction is uncertain as George must have come across 'cousinocracy' himself. Being half British/half Maltese with no experience of life in England, he did not have a well-connected benefactor on whom he could rely. He certainly did not come from an aristocratic family and his main connection in the consular service was through Brant and Ross, neither of whom appeared to be well connected in London.

George did not stay in the Levant long term. Finally, with the promotion he long sought, he went to Nicolaiev (in the Ukraine) as Consul. In December 1872, during a visit to Malta, he wrote to Earl Granville on the situation regarding slaves being transported through Malta. Although illegal, the practice continued as the suspected slaves refused to admit that they were slaves under fear of reprisals by their owners. Instead, they claimed they were servants travelling of their own free will. George suggested that all 'passengers' from Barbary (and ideally Sicily as well) must have a British visa.<sup>69</sup> In 1876, he became Consul at St. Thomas' Island in the Caribbean and thereafter went on to Brazil.<sup>70</sup>

By 1855, according to Wright, there were no British merchants operating in Persia, and he stated that even the Stevens brothers had withdrawn from commercial activity.<sup>71</sup> The Tehran consulate closed during the lead up, and for the duration of the Anglo-Persian War from November 1856 - April 1857. By the time the consulate reopened after the war, George had gone to Trebizond leaving behind debts that were to cause embarrassment to his brother.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>64</sup> For further reading on the reasons, see Berridge, 2015, 72-83. Correspondence does show that Grenville-Murray did write to London in an effort to assist George.

<sup>65</sup> Berridge, 73.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 78.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid..

<sup>69</sup> Michael Refalo, *Slavery, Malta at the Crossroads* (Malta, BDL Publishing, 2015) 94.

<sup>70</sup> 'Levantine Heritage', Retrieved on 4 Mar 2015 from [www.levantineheritage.com](http://www.levantineheritage.com).

George Stevens is mentioned in *Small Islands, Large Questions: Society, Culture and Resistance in the Post -Emancipation Caribbean*, by Karen Fog Olwig, retrieved from <https://books.google.com/books?id=NQWaAgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=karen+olwig&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjW7KC1vLnXAhVMJiYKHbbQDcoQ6AEILDAB#v=onepage&q=karen%20olwig&f=false>. 152. Berridge, 80.

<sup>71</sup> Wright, 98.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 98.



But the Stevens family line re-emerged in Persia later in the century. Hildebrand Stevens, a son of Francis, was employed by Zieglers<sup>73</sup> (a leader in the carpet trade) after coming from Turkey in or about 1875. He later established himself as an importer/exporter and his business thrived under the name of '*Hild. F. Stevens and Son*' with branches throughout the country. Both he and his son, Charles, were held in high regard in Tabriz by the British and Persian communities. Both were also honorary Vice-Consuls representing British interests in the absence of a consul-general. Charles died in 1934 leaving no heir and the business closed.<sup>74</sup>

It was not just merchants and consuls who travelled abroad in search of opportunity but also the extended support network that was needed for the community. On 9 August 1863, Dr William Cormick wrote to William John Stevens in Malta requesting his assistance in finding a governess for his daughter at their family home in Tabriz.<sup>75</sup> Cormick, had trained and practiced in London and Paris before joining the East India Company but finally settled in Tabriz after being summoned by the Shah of Persia in 1844.<sup>76</sup> He and his Armenian wife had two daughters; the letter which took several days to write, states initially that he requires two governesses, but several pages later he mentions that one has just died and therefore only one governess is now required. The letter also highlighted that the proposed governess, Miss Arnold, was currently unemployed in Malta and was anxious to find a new position. Cormick suggested that if another governess could also be found for his sister's family, the ladies could travel from Malta together. Otherwise he hoped that Miss Arnold would travel out with Dickson, possibly a reference to Joseph Dickson, the Legation doctor from 1848-87.<sup>77</sup>

The Stevens' brothers were not unique in having familial ties in the region. Joseph Dickson's brother, William was also in Tabriz working as a translator and interpreter. The Abbott family were similarly well represented in the region. Keith Abbott, had his cousin, William George Abbott, relieve him while he went on home leave and this experience served William well as he went on to have a consular career in the region.<sup>78</sup> He had also worked in Turkey for James Brant who must have benefited from having so many connections within the consular world.<sup>79</sup> Brant himself had family ties; Lee of '*Lee & Brant*' was his uncle who formerly operated under '*Lee & Sons*'. James' father was a silk merchant in London and his mother was Mr. Lee's sister.

The hardship of an isolated posting was further exacerbated by the consular system which meant home leave was rarely feasible. Consuls were entitled to only one month's leave per year, which could not be carried forward with travel time included. There was also no passage allowance for the consul himself or his family, making the cost prohibitive and, as a result, consuls were rarely able to return home. Consul Robert Cumberbatch, posted to Smyrna in the 1850's, never left the country in twenty-seven years.<sup>80</sup> Francis was more fortunate; in a letter to his brother, William John, dated 30 July 1841, he wrote that he hoped to visit Malta in the period between leaving Ezereem and starting in Tabriz in the autumn.

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<sup>73</sup> 'Zielgers' was a leader in the carpet trade, and according to Wright, 'deserves much credit for having pioneered this business which, long before oil, became an important factor in balancing Persian trade with Europe'. Wright, 100.

<sup>74</sup> Wright, 100.

<sup>75</sup> NAM, R451.Box A/31.

<sup>76</sup> Wright, 124.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 124. Joseph Dickson studied at the University of Malta and was successful at the examinations in chemistry, natural history and botany on 26 October 1837 and obtained the Licentiate on 2 July 1838. He qualified for a doctorate on 4 July 1839 and received the degree at the Church of the University on the 19 July 1839. Paul Cassar, 'Overseas Medical Graduates and Students at the University of Malta in the Nineteenth Century', *Melita Historica*, 8 (1981) 2 (93-100), 93.

<sup>78</sup> Wright, 81.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 79.

<sup>80</sup> Platt, 29.

He intended to request five or six weeks' leave, which he felt was the longest he could reasonably expect, but he was hopeful that as his posting to Persia was likely to be a long one, his request would be granted. The problem he envisaged was that on top of the sea voyage he would have to perform *pratique* in Malta. The plague had recently broken out in Ezeroom with upwards of thirty deaths a day and therefore *pratique* would be strictly enforced upon his arrival in Malta. Allowing for travel time and *pratique*, he feared that his time in Malta would be very short, but even so, he would 'be satisfied by a look at you all across the Lazaretto railings'.<sup>81</sup>

As we have seen, the Stevens brothers received no formal training for their roles as consular officials prior to their departure to the Levant. In 1846, the Malta Protestant College opened with the aim of providing education to young men, admitting not only the sons of Anglo-Maltese living in Malta, but also the sons of businessmen, diplomats, missionaries, consuls and military and naval officers based in other colonial outposts such as India, or closer Mediterranean posts such as in Sicily. Its aim was to educate 'youthful Orientals of good character and fair abilities'<sup>82</sup> who, after gaining a liberal education would be prepared for careers as merchants, or be able to join the diplomatic corps or the military. Those wishing to return to their home countries could do so as interpreters, schoolmasters, government agents, lawyers or physicians, and in doing so would promote British interests and spread the Anglican word.<sup>83</sup> The college only lasted for twenty years as it was plagued with staffing problems and, as Salv. Mallia observes, the conflicting objectives of providing theological instruction for potential missionaries with training fee-paying students in commercial and professional occupations. This argument reiterates the opinion of the time, that only the sons of 'true' British parents could be trusted to carry out the work of a consul. Mallia quotes a reader of *The Malta Times* in 1845 that:

'Positions of dragomen, attaches and consuls should only be given to Malta Protestant College students who had distinguished themselves and were "thoroughly English in both the father and the mother – no Hybrids – but English, with English feelings, courage and truth, and even English prejudices" were suitable'.<sup>84</sup>

If this was the generally held view, then the Stevens' brothers would not have been considered as suitable candidates for consular positions. It is known that Richard was considered a 'Levantine' as he had never been to England, and this was 'told against him as far as the Foreign Office and the Legation was concerned'.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, Keith Abbott, who although well respected in the community, was viewed by the Foreign Office as 'an out and out Persian'.<sup>86</sup>

By the end of his career as primarily a notary and solicitor, William John Stevens, (the eldest son) also held several consular positions in Malta. His first appointment was in 1842 when he became the Danish consul,<sup>87</sup> then in 1859 he became consul for Persia, a position he held until 1877.<sup>88</sup> In 1862, he was appointed consul for Mecklenburg for a period of six years.<sup>89</sup> A letter dated 6 June 1859 to William John refers to an unknown third party who held 'nearly as many consulates as yourself'.<sup>90</sup> Another undated letter has a post-script,

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<sup>81</sup> NAV, R450/Box B/9. The letter bears slits cut into each page showing that it had been prepared for fumigation upon arrival in Malta as it had come from a plague-ridden area.

<sup>82</sup> Salv. Mallia, 'The Malta Protestant College', *Melita Historica*, New Series, 10 (1990) 3 (257-282).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid 258.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 266.

<sup>85</sup> Wright, 80.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid..

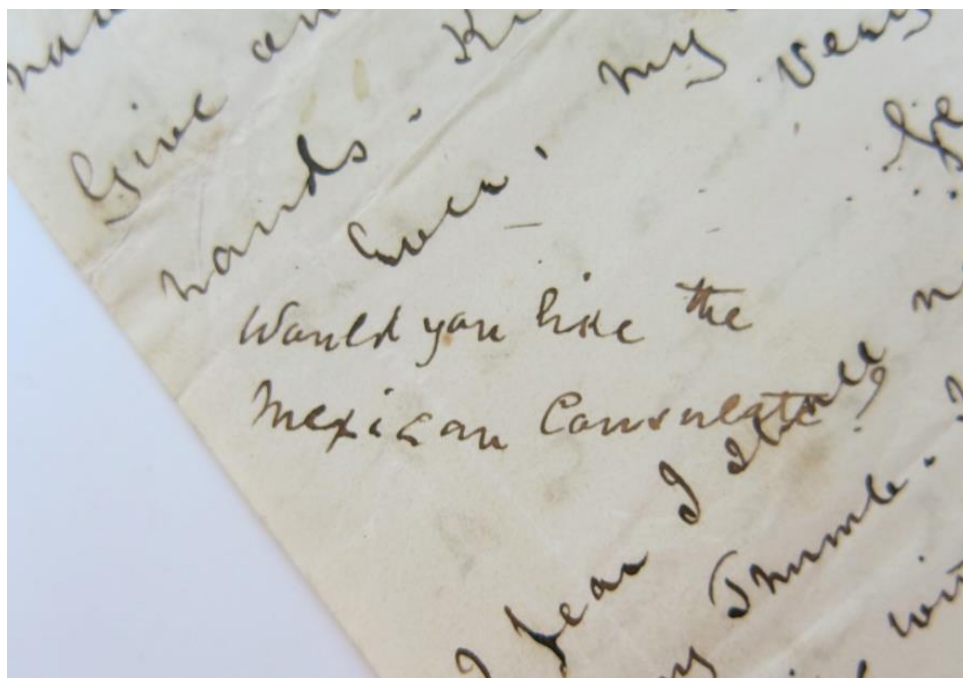
<sup>87</sup> NAV, R450/Box B/19.

<sup>88</sup> NAM, *The Malta Blue Books* – 'Return of Consuls for Foreign Countries Residing in Malta', 1862.

<sup>89</sup> Mecklenburg is in northern Germany.

<sup>90</sup> NAV, R451/Box Letters & receipts, 6 June 1859.

written in the margin reading ‘would you like the Mexican consul?’<sup>91</sup> almost as a casual, throw away remark or afterthought. No evidence shows that he took up the offer.



*Personal letter from unknown author to WJS “would you like the Mexican Consulate?”*

According to John Chircop,<sup>92</sup> most migrants returned to Malta towards the end of their working life, to see out their days with their families. But the Stevens’ brothers, and their families stayed abroad with only their brother-in-law, Frederick Guarracino finally returning to Malta although it is unknown if he was accompanied by his wife, Ellen.

Richard’s wife Regina<sup>93</sup> died of cholera in Sufiyan (a district on the outskirts of Tabriz) during a cholera outbreak. After his wife’s death, Richard’s three young daughters (Marie Louise, Carolina and Augusta) were sent to live with their uncle, William John, in Malta. Richard’s son, Richard George who also went by the name Hadgi Baba, and whose godfather was reputedly the Shah of Persia (despite what he had said about Richard), was sent to boarding school in England.<sup>94</sup> Richard then joined the ‘*Punjab and Delhi Railways*’ in India but when his health failed, he was sent on twelve-months’ medical leave back to England and died *en route* at Karachi in 1864.

Francis’ obituary appeared in Malta’s *Public Opinion* newspaper on 25 September 1877,<sup>95</sup> and outlined his life as having entered the British Consular Service in 1837 as Vice-Consul in Trebizond (Turkey), later becoming Consul in Erzurum (Turkey). During the war with Russia (1854) he was agent for the Land Transport Corps, sending in ordnance and commissariat stores for the relief of the Kars. He retired in 1867 due to ill health and resided in Smyrna (Izmir, west coast of Turkey) with his ‘large’ family where he died and is buried. He had married Adelaide Charnaud,<sup>96</sup> who came from a French Protestant family, her father having emigrated to England where he became a nationalised Briton before heading to the

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<sup>91</sup> NAV, R450/Box B/7.

<sup>92</sup> Chircop, 350-51.

<sup>93</sup> Regina is buried in the Armenian cemetery in Tabriz as was Dr William Cormick’s brother<sup>93</sup> and father who died during the same outbreak. Cormick himself was buried there in 1877.

<sup>94</sup> NAV, R450/Box unclassified.

<sup>95</sup> *Public Opinion*, 25 September 1877.

<sup>96</sup> Adelaide Emily Charnaud, (b.1818 – d.1909). They had six children.

Retrieved on 11 May 2016 from <http://gw.geneanet.org/marmara2?lang=en&p=frank&n=stevens>.

Levant. Adelaide was born in Smyrna but had moved to Trebizond to join her brother when her father died, where she met, and then married Francis.<sup>97</sup>

George, presumably with his family, moved on from the Levant to become Consul at the St. Thomas Islands in the Caribbean and then later in Brazil. His place of death is unknown.

Several other brothers also spent time abroad. Frederick Hildebrand Stevens<sup>98</sup> had a distinguished career in HM Navy rising to the rank of Commander<sup>99</sup> by the time he retired in 1845. He received the *Royal Humane Society's* Silver Medal for rescuing a drowning sailor, was noted for his knowledge of Arabic, and took part in an expedition to remove ancient marbles from the Valley on Xanthus. He returned to Malta as the Governor of the Naval Prison from 1854 before eventually retiring to England.<sup>100</sup>

Little is known of the seven surviving daughters other than Ellen and Augusta who had travelled with their father to visit their brother Francis in Trebizond in Perhaps Stevens' had taken them abroad to find them marriage partners: he had seven daughters to marry off and records do not show any of the daughters marrying while in Malta. Indeed, finding 'suitable' husbands appears to have been difficult in Malta. According to 'Arabella' who was writing about her time in Malta from 1823-1828: -

'Malta is not a *marrying* place. There has only been one wedding since we have been in the Island. ... that the youth is about twenty-three and the age of the lady, who was a widow, is registered thirty-two in the marriage articles .... but from the age of her eldest daughter, who is eighteen, know her to be forty-three!'<sup>101</sup>

Taking two daughters abroad fits in with the narrative of the 'fishing fleet' when young ladies left Britain for outposts such as India and the Far East in search of husbands. A lack of eligible girls, and an excess of bachelors in remote postings, meant they normally found a husband quickly. So, despite Stevens' claiming that his daughters' marriage prospects were ruined by his court case,<sup>102</sup> Ellen married Frederick Guarracino,<sup>103</sup> the British consul in Batumi (Georgia) in 1846 at the consulate in Trebizond where her brother Francis was stationed. In 1857, they were in Samson where Ellen's sister Caroline came to visit.<sup>104</sup> Their son, born in Crete in 1862 was followed by a daughter, and while little else is known of Ellen, her husband did eventually settle in Malta where he was Secretary at the Union Club. He died in November 1889 but there is no mention of Ellen or his children in his obituary.<sup>105</sup>

Whether Augusta married or even returned to Malta from the Levant, is unknown, but her sisters Eliza and Rosina, who had remained in Malta did not marry.<sup>106</sup> The wills of Eliza and Rosina show that several daughters did marry. The sisters specify in their wills, written

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<sup>97</sup> 'Levantine Heritage'.

<sup>98</sup> Frederick Hildebrand Stevens married Sara Augusta Croft in 1851 and they had ten children.

<sup>99</sup> NAV, R450/Box B/1.

<sup>100</sup> 'Naval List 1854', retrieved on 16 January 2016 from <https://books.google.com/books?id=Ru0NAAAAQAAJ&dq=The%20Navy%20List&pg=RA2-PA246#v=onepage&q=Stevens&f=false>.

<sup>101</sup> Arabella M. Stuart, *Arabella's Letters, together with the contents of her small Diary, 1823-1828*, (London, Hodder and Stoughton) 192.

<sup>102</sup> One of William Stevens' claims regarding the hardship that the court case and prison sentence against him was that it affected his daughters' marriage prospects.

<sup>103</sup> Frederick Guarracino (b. 19 August 1819 Corfu, d. 11 November 1889 Malta); m. 7 December 1846 in Trebizond to Ellen Georgina Stevens.

<sup>104</sup> NAV. R450/C/14.

<sup>105</sup> *Malta Chronicle*, 15 November 1889. The funeral took place on 13 November at Tà Braxia Cemetery.

<sup>106</sup> NAV, MS 999, Notary George Domenic Page, February 1897.

in 1897, that all monies and family portraits are to be divided between several named nieces and nephews including Kathleen and Regina Stevens (residing in Batoum), Adelaide and Alma Stevens (Smyrna), Edward Stevens (Marseilles), Georgina Seefeldten, (Constantinople) and Louise Suter then resident in Cairo.<sup>107</sup> None of the nieces and nephews referred to in the wills were in Malta which suggests that, despite a family of fifteen children, the Stevens family presence in Malta was much diminished. The eldest son, William John Stevens never married and Charles Francis, despite marrying twice was also without issue. From the copious amount of material found at the Valletta Notarial Archives written by both father and son, including personal as well as notarial papers, it would appear that William John took over his father's business despite the fact that they were not on good terms in the later years.<sup>108</sup>

Just as Maltese men in the nineteenth century migrated in search of work and better opportunities, so too did three of William Stevens' sons, a move that was perceived to benefit the whole family. As Stevens Senior had been a migrant himself, coming to Malta in 1803, he may well have encouraged his sons to look abroad when economic necessity and family circumstances, demanded it. How could seven sons find employment in the relatively limited Maltese economic environment? Such a large family needed to spread its wings and form a network to benefit the whole. While migration for employment purposes was confined to three sons, three daughters also left Malta, albeit initially to provide support for their brothers with one finding a husband and remaining abroad.

The Stevens' brothers were fortunate that their father, through his notarial business, was able to introduce them to James Brant who offered them initially clerical roles which later evolved into consular positions in the Levant. While the Stevens' brothers were not well connected to the London arm of the consular system, and as such, not a part of the 'cousinocracy' network so despised by Grenville-Murray, they appear to have greatly benefited from their father's connection with the merchant/consul James Brant and their relationship with each other. Once this connection had been made, the brothers all benefitted from Brant's promotions and movements around the Levant.

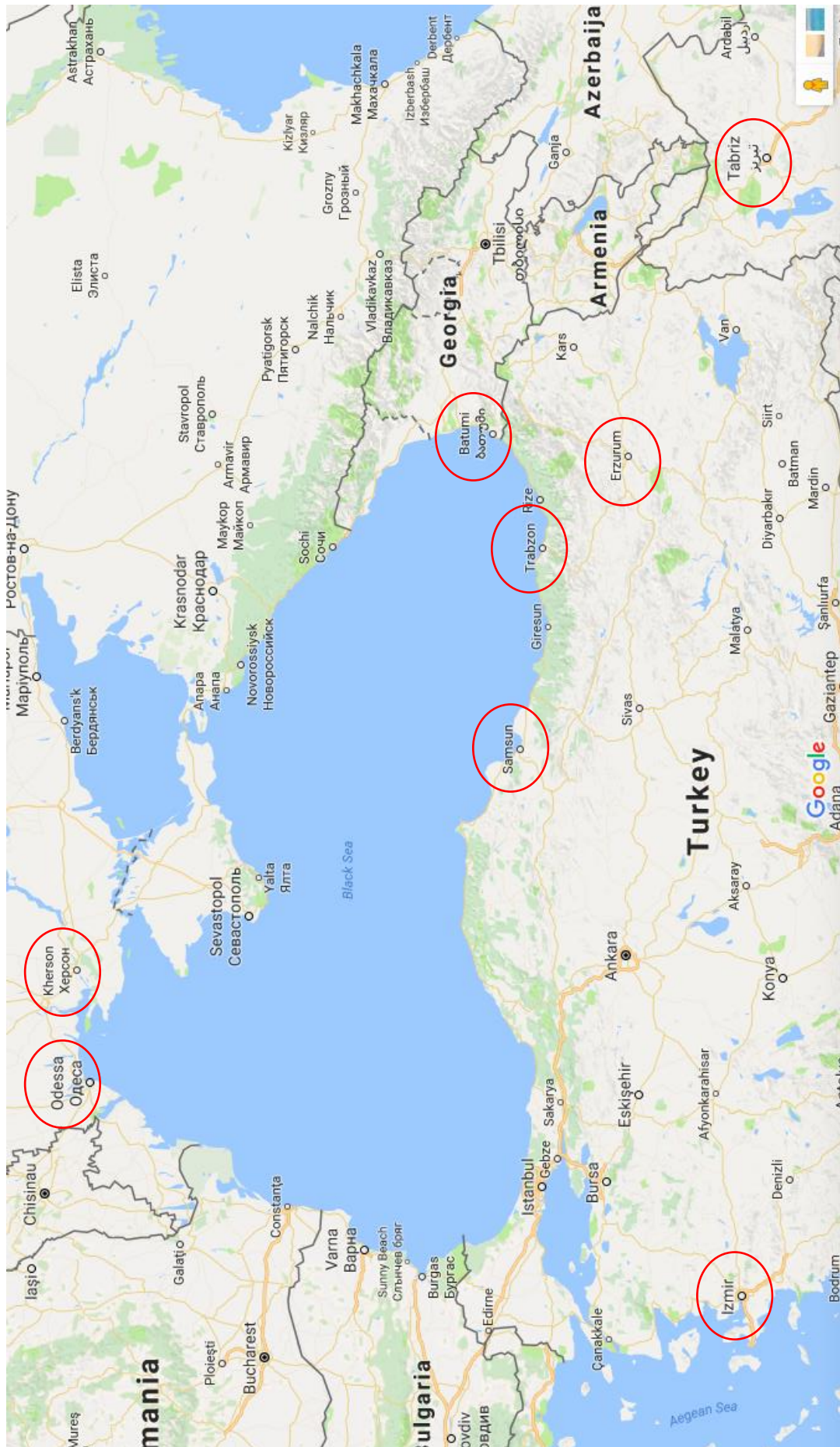
It was debated during this period as to whether consuls should be permitted to trade in addition to their consular duties and even whether foreigners should be allowed to serve in the British diplomatic corps. Both issues would have had a direct impact on the Stevens' brothers. While their mixed heritage may have been an issue forcing them to downplay their Maltese ancestry and focus on their Anglo surname, it may also have enabled them to mix with a wider socio-economic group. As part of an extended family, each brother had a connectivity around the Levant reaching back to Malta and the brothers' movements, later with their own families, shows their adaptability and resourcefulness.

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<sup>107</sup> Richard Stevens' daughter Louise married Henry Suter. She and her husband Harry (Henry Charles Nelson) Suter and their young daughter were kidnapped by brigands in 1881. *The Times*, 21 April 1881.

<sup>108</sup> NAV, R450/Box B/4, letter dated 27 November 1846 to Arthur Perkins Esq, Smyrna.





Map of the Levant region showing where Stevens Brothers occupied Consular posts

